

Testimony of Sara Talpos

Re: Support for the Children's Safe Products Act (HB 4763-69)

April 22, 2009

Members of the House Committee on Great Lakes & Environment:

I would like to tell you about a gift my son received for his first birthday: A pair of yellow rain boots that fit in the palm of my hand. I looked forward to seeing my son wear them, waddling through puddles and backyard mud. Unfortunately, he never got the chance, for I soon discovered that this birthday gift was loaded with toxic chemicals, including lead, cadmium, and arsenic.

This information came not from the manufacturer, nor from the store where the boots were purchased, nor from the federal government. Instead, I learned about the toxic chemicals from a website, HealthyToys.org, sponsored by nonprofit environmental groups around the country. From this website, I also learned that such chemicals are present in a variety of children's products. How many of us, when we buy gifts for our children, or grandchildren, stop to consider that the toy we purchase might do harm to our children or to the environment?

Which brings me to the bills before you today. Unbelievably, there is nothing in our country's laws stating that we have the right to know about what potentially hazardous chemicals are contained in products our children use every day. These bills within the Safe Children's Product Act will provide parents with this much-needed information on some of the worst chemicals.

I know from personal experience that this legislation would have affected the decisions I made as a new parent. Not long after my son was born, my husband bought a baby bottle, which we later learned contained Bisphenol-A, a chemical recently banned from baby bottles in Canada and identified by our own National Toxicology Program as a chemical of "some concern" (National Institute). When my son turned two, we bought him a toy birthday cake. Recently, we discovered that the candy toppings he puts in his mouth contain barium. It troubles me that I have unknowingly exposed my son to products with toxic chemicals.

Parents want more information. I remember a cold Saturday morning in March, watching parents stand in line, in some cases for over an hour, waiting for an opportunity to test their child's toys for toxic chemicals. In my kids' playgroup, I sometimes hear words like "endocrine disrupter" and "leachability" alongside more pleasant conversations about parks and museums.

The Toy Industry Association has argued that "The mere presence of inaccessible substances in trace amounts does not mean a product is harmful" (Toy Industry Association). I will leave it to the experts to determine whether these substances are indeed "trace" and "inaccessible," although I do know that even a small amount of a very toxic chemical can be damaging, and cumulative exposures over a lifetime have real impacts. Instead, I will note that from a parent's standpoint, this reflects a narrow—and not at all comforting—response to the issue. For it does not account for the lifecycle cost of a product: Many of these toys release toxins when they are